

The University of Chicago

THE *MISSOURI DEMOCRAT* AND
THE CIVIL WAR

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1934

By
LUCY LUCILE TASHER

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1936

The University of Chicago

THE *MISSOURI DEMOCRAT* AND
THE CIVIL WAR

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED
TO THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY

1934

By

LUCY LUCILE TASHER

Private Edition, Distributed by
THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO LIBRARIES
CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

1936



THE MISSOURI DEMOCRAT AND THE CIVIL WAR

Into the maelstrom of factions and principles which menaced Missouri's hope of political unity came the guiding current of the Missouri Democrat. Founded, in 1853,¹ by Francis Preston Blair, Jr., it supported Thomas Hart Benton in his struggle to regain his place in the United States Senate. In 1856, the paper deserted Bentonian ideals and followed the Blair family into the Republican fold where it remained during the Civil War period.

The Democrat came through the pre-war years with an ever-increasing enthusiasm for anti-slavery. Established as a freesoil paper, it denounced the Lecompton Constitution in 1858,² advocated colonization of freed Negroes in some tropical climate, preferably Panama,³ and supported Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln-Douglas senatorial contest.⁴

When, however, this newly Republicanized paper selected a presidential candidate for its favor in the days preceding the Chicago Convention of 1860, it chose Edward Bates,⁵ Blair, its editor, nominated Bates in the Convention. When Lincoln became the standard-bearer, the Democrat fell into line and actively supported the Convention's choice.⁶ Even though Missouri was a

¹J. Thomas Scharf, History of St. Louis City and County (Philadelphia, 1883), I, 925.

²Missouri Democrat, March 17, 1858 (St. Louis, Missouri).

³Ibid., January 20, 1858.

⁴Ibid., August, 1858.

⁵Ibid., January 19, 1860.

⁶Ibid., May 19, 1860.

Democratic stronghold where Douglas enjoyed a large following, Blair and the Democrat were able to deliver St. Louis to Lincoln in the fall election.⁷ Their success was more impressive since the other St. Louis newspapers were against Lincoln. The anti-Douglas, pro-Lincoln editorials of the Democrat were a powerful factor in this contest which united the foreign element of the city, its merchant class, its railroad interests, and its freedom-loving citizens into one political group - Republican voters.

In January, 1861, the question of probable secession occupied Missouri's attention. A Convention was elected to make the decision. Editorials in the Democrat emphasizing the economic benefits to be derived from a decision for the Union helped to turn the sentiment of the Convention, sitting in St. Louis, against secession.⁸ Later they helped to secure the deposition of Governor Claiborne F. Jackson, southern sympathizer,⁹ and the substitution of Hamilton R. Gamble, who actively aided the Union cause until his death in 1864.¹⁰ The decision against secession was definitely made by the Convention in October, 1861.¹¹

Throughout the opening days of the Civil War in Missouri, the Democrat aggressively supported military action. In the struggle for the control of the St. Louis arsenal, Blair and his news-

⁷H.C. McDougal, "A Decade of Missouri Politics 1860-1870 from a Republican Viewpoint," Missouri Historical Review, III (January, 1909), 147, also Springfield Daily Republican, November 12, 1860 (Springfield, Massachusetts).

⁸Missouri Democrat, March 13, 1861.

⁹Ibid., August 2, 1861.

¹⁰Sceva Bright Laughlin, "Missouri Politics During the Civil War," Missouri Historical Review, XXIV (January, 1930), 263.

¹¹Journal and Proceedings of the Missouri State Convention (St. Louis, October, 1861).

paper thwarted every attempt of southern-minded men to seize this important storehouse of arms and ammunition. When Brigadier-General D.M. Frost, of the state militia, who was pro-southern in his sympathies, considered that he had by diplomacy won a victory over Major W.H. Bell commanding the arsenal, Blair was at hand to strengthen the wavering leader.¹² As late as April, 1861, Jefferson Davis was still hoping that Jackson would be able to capture the arsenal.¹³ However, his hopes were in vain.¹⁴

Later, when Blair and his friend, Nathaniel Lyon, who had become the new commander of the arsenal, captured the state militia encamped at Camp Jackson, the Democrat came to their defense.¹⁵ It approved military success. When the last futile effort to keep peace within the state had been made on June 11, 1861, and war had been declared both by General Lyon and Governor Jackson, the Democrat characterized the Governor's proclamation as illegal, unconstitutional and revolutionary.¹⁶ The paper was fighting for the Union.

When John C. Frémont was appointed commander of the Department of the West, the Democrat gave him a warm welcome.¹⁷ Gradually, as the summer advanced, its support of the general became more definite. When he failed to relieve General Lyon at Wilson's Creek, it printed no word of censure; when he issued his emancipa-

¹²W.F. Switzler, Illustrated History of Missouri (St. Louis, 1879), pp. 355-6 gives letter from Frost to Jackson, January 24, 1861.

¹³Confederate Military History (Atlanta, 1899), IX, 8.

¹⁴John McElroy, The Struggle for Missouri (Washington, 1913), pp. 35-6; also see Missouri Democrat, April 23, 1861.

¹⁵Missouri Democrat, May 13, 1861.

¹⁶Ibid., June 14, 1861.

¹⁷Ibid., July 26, 1861.

tion proclamation, on August 30, 1861, it rejoiced.¹⁸

In September, 1861, in an unofficial letter to his brother Montgomery, Frank Blair, although he was an officer under Frémont, censured the general for his extravagance and inactivity. This communication was brought to the attention of the President. When Frémont learned of it, he arrested Blair immediately. In the argument that resulted, the Democrat permanently deserted its leader, Blair, for the banner of the emancipator, Frémont.¹⁹ This change in policy has never been fully explained. However, contemporary opinion suggested that jealous rivals on the Democrat's staff, envying Blair's political and military honors, took this occasion to withdraw their support.²⁰ Whatever the reason, the paper did not return during the Civil War period to the ranks of Blair's followers. Instead, it praised Frémont whenever the opportunity offered. Despite its support, however, the Blairs succeeded in securing Frémont's removal in November, 1861.²¹

The problem of the Democrat in 1862 was not to save Missouri for the Union but to keep it saved. A new cause, abolition, was presented.²² In accordance with this idea came the presidential plan of compensated abolition, which the Democrat thought too slow but supported since nothing better was offered.²³

In April, 1862, a Union slate was elected in the municipal contest and the Democrat was assured of more help from city offic-

¹⁸ Ibid., August 31, 1861.

¹⁹ Ibid., Sept., Oct., 1861.

²⁰ Missouri Republican, August 15, 1862.

²¹ W. Brotherhead, General Frémont and the Injustice Done Him by Politicians and Envious Military Men (Philadelphia, 1862), pp. 6-7.

²² Missouri Democrat, February 10, 1862.

²³ Ibid., March 13, 1862.

ials.²⁴ These newly elected men were not, however, a "radical" Union group, using the term radical in the sense of ultra-Union, anti-slavery, anti-southern. Consequently, the Democrat, which was rapidly leaning toward this type of radicalism, was not yet entirely satisfied. Throughout the year, 1862, it advocated emancipation as a state policy. Its method of attack was marked by an aggressiveness, a noisiness, which so often accompanies radical agitation. Although the end of the year found all of the St. Louis newspapers advocating some type of abolition, the Negro in Missouri was not yet free.

Consequently, the fight was continued in 1863. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation failed to help Missouri's slaves. His compensated abolition plan was defeated.²⁵ The Democrat was still working for emancipation in Missouri, however. The first skirmish was won when the ultra-radicals secured control of the city government in the April elections.²⁶ The state government and emancipation were the next goals. Continual editorials kept the question before the people. When the State Convention which had taken the place of the Legislature in the government of the state, met in June, even the more conservative members realized that action was necessary, for "The Dutch and radicals must be checked - or we are gone to the Devil."²⁷ The efforts of the Democrat were rewarded by the Convention's compromise ordinance which made July 4, 1876, the day of freedom.²⁸ This was not enough. The radical

²⁴Ibid., April 5, 1862.

²⁵Ibid., March 6, 1863.

²⁶Laughlin, op. cit., XXIV, 103-4.

²⁷James S. Rollins to James O. Broadhead, June 8, 1863, in "Broadhead Papers" (Missouri Historical Society, Jefferson Memorial Library, St. Louis, Missouri).

²⁸Switzler, op. cit., p. 342.

editors announced, "So long as slavery remains, it will be the subject of political controversy."²⁹ They were determined to keep up the tension in order to insure immediate emancipation. They defined "conservative unionism" as a "catch-all defense" phrase used to include anything from "weak and diluted patriotism" to "open and avowed rebellion in arms against the authority of the Government."³⁰

For a time, in 1864, the paper's fight for emancipation was less conspicuous than its agitation for Frémont as a presidential candidate. The Democrat maintained that Lincoln should "take his chances" in a convention "with other candidates."³¹ It asserted that his amnesty plan was too lenient, and, if allowed to stand, the conquered states would pass "into the hands of men who prefer treason to loyalty and slavery to freedom."³² When St. Louisans, in April, elected the ultra-radical candidate for mayor by a two to one vote, the Democrat interpreted their choice as a blow to the President and his amnesty plan.³³ The editors, moreover, maintained that it was a victory for Frémont. According to their view, upon Frémont, the Pathfinder,³⁴ devolved the duty of saving his country; Lincoln, the conservative, had failed.³⁵

When the Baltimore Convention chose Lincoln once more, the Democrat was disappointed, since it would have preferred Grant, Frémont, Butler, or Chase. However, it declared itself ready to stand by the nomination.³⁶ It viewed the platform with favor and

²⁹ Missouri Democrat, July 6, 1863.

³⁰ Ibid., October 26, 1863.

³¹ Ibid., February 3, 1864.

³² Ibid., March 17, 1864.

³³ Ibid., April 23, 1864.

³⁴ Ibid., March 26, 1864.

³⁵ Ibid., April 11, 1864.

³⁶ Ibid., June 10, 1864.

decided that on the new platform Lincoln was more radical than Frémont.³⁷

The Democrat was very busy in the summer of 1864. It was determined to bring harmony into the relationship between state and city governments. This could be done by electing an ultra-radical state government. Then, too, it was watching the Copperheads all over the nation. It maintained that every true citizen must "effectively wield his influence for an overwhelming victory of patriotism at the polls in November," for there was to occur the determining battle of the war, there the American people was to "decide either to continue or cease to be a nation."³⁸

The peace negotiations at Niagara further aroused the Democrat. Its editors doubted their sincerity. Referring to the rebels, they said:

They were pretending to seek peace for the purpose of strengthening a peace sentiment in the Northern States. They wanted to give the Copperheads within the Union the opportunity of saying that the rebels wanted to stop the war.

The Democrat went further and called the meeting a "well contrived feint in favor of pacification" executed "at the time they supposed would best suit the Chicago Convention, in which they knew their allies would have a numerous representation, if not a controlling voice."³⁹

As the summer advanced, the Democrat aggressively supported Lincoln and denounced McClellan, the candidate of the Democratic party. Its vigorous and continuous propaganda brought results in November when the entire radical slate, with one minor exception, was elected. Not only did the people of Missouri choose radical

³⁷Ibid., June 27, 1864.

³⁸Ibid., July 19, 1864.

³⁹Ibid., July 25, 1864.

national and state officers, if Lincoln could be termed a radical even by the jubilant Democrat, but they also voted to call a convention for the purpose of amending the state constitution.⁴⁰ Now the hope of immediate emancipation and anti-southern measures would soon be realized.

The Convention met in St. Louis, the stronghold of the Democrat, on January 6, 1865. On January 11, it passed an ordinance which freed Missouri's slaves immediately.⁴¹ Thus Missouri formally and voluntarily abolished slavery eleven months before the thirteenth amendment was proclaimed.

But the radicals were determined upon more reform than emancipation. That gained, they moved on not to amend but thoroughly to revise the entire constitution. By means of an iron-clad test oath, which was made a part of the new constitution, all Missourians who had in any way sympathized with the South were eliminated from participation in government.⁴² By means of an "ousting ordinance" all officials, who might have worked against the new constitution, were eliminated from office.⁴³ Thus did radicalism protect its new government. Since no person ineligible to vote under the proposed test oath was to be allowed to vote at the election either for or against the proposed constitution, its acceptance was almost assured. The iron-clad oath clearly indicated the trend of radicalism in Missouri. "Let the subjugated states be dealt with as they deserve. We have fairly conquered

⁴⁰Laughlin, op. cit., XXIV, 284.

⁴¹Journal of the Missouri State Convention (St. Louis, 1865), p. 281.

⁴²Switzler, op. cit., pp. 454-5.

⁴³Walter B. Stevens, Missouri the Center State 1821-1915 (Chicago, 1915), I, 334.

the rebellion: Now let us punish the traitors."⁴⁴

The radical plan of campaign for the adoption of the new constitution was based largely on three ideas: the constitution must be supported as a party measure; political disfranchisement of rebels was justified and essential to the continuance of the radical power; and all opposed to adoption were disloyal or aiding the cause of the disloyal.⁴⁵ The vote upon the constitution was very close. Had it not been for the soldier vote, the radicals would have lost.⁴⁶ However, the new plan of government was accepted and proclaimed by the governor, July 4, 1865.⁴⁷ The radicals reached a climax in their appropriation of power while the last straggling vote was being counted. They ousted the conservative judges.⁴⁸ Their control was now complete. The Democrat summed up the situation:

The victory which the Radicals have achieved in the adoption of the New Constitution is of no ordinary value or significance. No higher proof could be given of the inherent power of their party, than the success they have won under the peculiar circumstances of the last election. . . . The last election in Missouri shows clearly enough that the Radicals have the power in the State if they see fit to use it with the prudence necessary to secure its preservation.⁴⁹

The editors of the Democrat could be depended upon to see to it that abuses and open disregard of principles were overlooked and the necessary prudence exercised to retain the hard-earned

⁴⁴Missouri Democrat, April 20, 1865.

⁴⁵Ibid., May 17, 1865.

⁴⁶Missouri Republican, Missouri Democrat, June 13, 14, 1865.

⁴⁷Laughlin, op. cit., XXIV, 284.

⁴⁸Thomas K. Skinker, "The Removal of the Judges of the Supreme Court of Missouri in 1865," Missouri Historical Society Collections (1914), IV, 243-74.

⁴⁹Missouri Democrat, July 1, 1865.

power. They could well congratulate themselves⁵⁰ upon the situation. They worked for a newspaper that was always a step ahead of each radical move, smoothing out the way. Not content with preparation, it also kept pushing from behind, so that the advance and rearguards always found the inspiration of the Democrat stimulating and reassuring.

To the Democrat, progress meant increased radicalism. No position was so extreme but that it could be counted upon to reach it in time. Jealous of the Union and bitterly hostile to the Confederacy, this paper fought a winning battle of newspaper wit and sarcasm in Missouri. By means of great intolerance, it was able to follow a straight course toward the goal of radical control. Insinuation, innuendo, threat and command, all were merely tools in the hands of cunning and crafty editors. The Union and emancipation were the war cries and every means was used to secure success. Whenever a position was gained, the shock troops of newspaperdom laid immediate plans for the next fortification. When Missouri definitely decided for the Union, emancipation was urged upon her, and when, at the close of the war, she finally accepted abolition, Negro suffrage took shape on the horizon.

The editors of the Democrat advocated extreme measures. No man was too high for criticism and when Lincoln, the man for whom they alone in Missouri had fought in 1860, was so conservative that he nullified Frémont's proclamation, they denounced him in 1861. When he failed to emancipate Missouri's slaves, they again censured him, when he might have been impressed with the Niagara meeting, they warned him and finally, before he became a

⁵⁰Bates to Doolittle, October 10, 1865, in "J.R. Doolittle Collection" (Missouri Historical Society, Jefferson Memorial Library, St. Louis, Missouri).

candidate for re-election, they were not afraid to admit that he was too conservative to rule the nation for another term. With these editors, trick and subterfuge were justified by the end in view. Camp Jackson was a wonderful victory, the constitution of 1865 was the crowning triumph of the war years. When they lost they grumbled and made excuses; when they won, they rejoiced with abandon. Frank Blair had set a tempo in the beginning which the Democrat increased more and more often.

In the changes that came to Missouri between 1860 and 1865 the Democrat took an active interest. In 1860, a southern sympathizing governor presided over a southern sympathizing legislature and only in St. Louis, the home of the Democrat, was there any coherent group of northern seeing men. Then the governor and legislature were supplanted, organized state troops were dispersed, a Union army was organized, a convention decided for the Union, emancipation was urged, a radical city and state government was obtained, emancipation was secured and, finally, a new constitution was adopted to unite and cement the radical factions and government. Throughout all of the struggles and bickerings, which such an overthrow of all institutions entailed, the Democrat stood firm and fearless for the radical program. It was consistently radical. No love was too great, no fear too strong, to swerve it from its course. Like a mighty sea, it hurled wave after wave of powerful propaganda against crumbling walls of conservatism.

